

November 27, 2012

Statement on SB 1358--"Educational Achievement Authority," "Achievement" schools, Educational Products thereof

Good afternoon and thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak on Senate Bill 1358. My name is Maiyoua Vang, and I am an assistant professor in the school of education at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. I speak today as a citizen who is very much concerned about the "learning platform" promoted by Dr. John Covington and which is currently in use in the 15 buildings delivered to the "Educational Achievement Authority" or EAA. I am alarmed that under SB 1358, not only will Detroit's children continue to be subjected to this untested learning platform, but more children throughout the state as well will be subjected to this yet unproven intervention product.

As a researcher, what speaks to me is data, and I would like to share some data with you now. At the start of Dr. Covington's second year as Superintendent of the Kansas City Missouri School District (academic year 2010-2011), he assigned a total of five elementary schools to pilot a new "Standards-based learning" product. This "standards-based" learning product was eventually rebranded to the now familiar "Student-Centered Learning" platform or SCL. The plan was to pilot this "Student-Centered Learning" or SCL platform in a few select elementary schools, evaluate the results, and then roll out the implementation in another five elementary schools the following year.

What I'm going to share with you now are the before and after results of Dr. Covington's SCL platform in Kansas City. According to state accountability test data from the Missouri Assessment Program or MAP, the first year's results of Dr. Covington's SCL initiative was mixed at best and disturbing at worst. To illustrate, here is the breakdown of third grade performance on Missouri's state accountability test for Primitivo Garcia Elementary, the "Model School" that Dr. Covington used to showcase SCL implementation in the district. The first graph shows 2010 performance data for the Communication Arts (i.e., Language Arts) before the implementation of SCL. The second graph shows 2011 performance data for Communication Arts after the implementation of SCL. All data is publicly accessible from the Missouri Department of Education website.

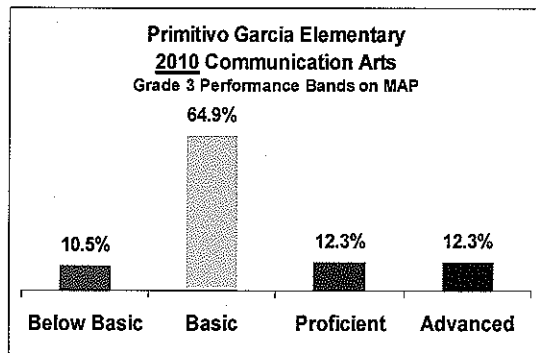


Figure 1 Performance Data pre-SCL platform

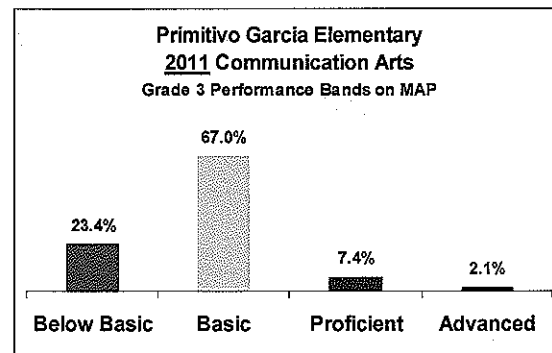
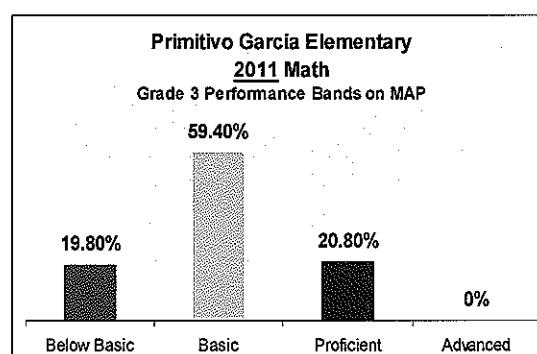
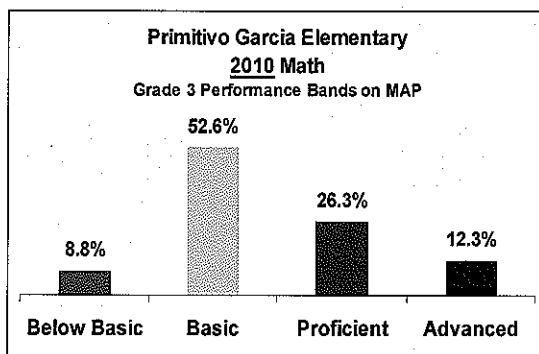


Figure 2 Performance Data post-SCL platform

We see that after SCL was implemented in this model school (Figure 2, second graph), the percentage of students scoring at both the advanced and proficient levels declined noticeably. Moreover, the percentage of students scoring in the lowest performance band, Below Basic, more than doubled.

As the following figures show, this backtracking also occurred in math, where after SCL implementation, 3rd Grade Math performance in the "advanced" performance band dropped dramatically from 12.3% to 0%. The percentage of students scoring "proficient" also dropped while the percentage of students performing in the "below basic" band more than doubled, from 8.8% to 19.8%. It appears that 3rd grade SCL implementation reduced the percentage of students scoring in the top two performance bands (proficient and advanced) at Primitivo Garcia School, increased slightly the percentage in the basic band, and more than doubled the percentage of students captured in the lowest band, or Below Basic.



Across the tested grade levels (3-7) in Primitivo Garcia Elementary, again the showcase school for the district's SCL implementation, performance data were troublesome. As Table 1 shows, the percentage of students scoring at proficient or advanced in the Communication Arts (Language Arts) dropped across all tested grade levels after Year 1

of implementing the SCL platform, with 7th grade plummeting from 62% of students in the proficient and advanced performance bands to a startling 0%.

	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th
Year 2010	24.6%	27.5%	26.3%	42.5%	62%
Year 2011*	9.5%	25.9%	25.1%	24.0%	0%

* Results after SCL implementation

Table 1 Primitivo Garcia Elementary: Percentage of Students in the Proficient and Advanced Performance Bands for Communication Arts, Before and After SCL

As Table 2 shows, with the exception of 5th grade, where performance remained roughly the same pre- and post- SCL implementation, Math scores similarly dropped across grade levels, with the biggest recorded drop occurring in 6th grade, down from 76.6% scoring in the proficient and advanced levels to 30.8% after SCL implementation.

	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th
Year 2010	30.6%	43.1%	31.6%	76.6%	28%
Year 2011*	20.8%	38.2%	32.3%	30.8%	No Data

* Results after SCL implementation

Table 2 Primitivo Garcia Elementary: Percentage of Students in the Proficient and Advanced Performance Bands for Math, Before and After SCL

Of the five pilot elementary schools Dr. Covington tapped for SCL rollout, two schools fared poorly (Primitivo Garcia being one), two performed modestly, and one school stayed relatively the same. The inconclusive and lackluster performance of SCL schools coupled with low test scores around the district hastened a school district press release that offered the following explanation:

The 2011 MAP [Missouri Assessment Program] scores posted by our students are lower than our 2010 results. This momentary dip in performance was not unexpected given the rapid and multifaceted changes the district has initiated... We're neither pleased nor satisfied with the results...

(Kansas City Missouri School District Press Release, August 4, 2011)

The press release goes on to cite the 2010-2011 launch of the pilot SCL schools, giving the rationale that these schools do not focus on "simply teaching to the test..." Even with the inconclusive data, five more elementary schools were scheduled to launch SCL in the 2011-2012 school year, but after Dr. Covington abruptly vacated his post as Kansas City Missouri Schools' chief in late August of 2011, the district scrapped the SCL initiative and there were no plans to follow up with test data.

For those reasons, I cannot emphasize enough my objection over launching an educational product, SCL, to be used on our most vulnerable of students in a proposed statewide school detention district. This intervention product was piloted, and very unscientifically, in a total of five elementary schools with dubious results. Furthermore, there were no middle schools or high schools included. There were no randomized trials, no longitudinal data, and thus no trend lines to scrutinize. We have but a year's worth of data on five elementary schools that is scientifically inconclusive, and yet we are ready to launch this statewide for our lowest 5% of schools under HB 6004.

Based on what little data is available of this SCL design, it is my contention that this intervention product, the cornerstone of the EAA curriculum, is unproven and again fails to merit statewide implementation with our most needy of schools. It is imperative that we avoid the kind of haphazard decision-making and unstable leadership that led to Dr. Covington's former district, Kansas City, being stripped of its state accreditation following his abrupt departure, as reported by the *New York Times* (Sulzeberger, September 20, 2011).

Thank you for your time and your service to the children of this state. I have full faith and confidence that you will place the learning of our children above and beyond anyone else's bottom line.

Respectfully submitted by Maiyoua Vang to the Senate Education Standing Committee
this November 27, 2012.



November 19, 2012

Maiyoua Vang:

Thank you for contacting me concerning Dr Covington's commitment to including parents and parent input as a key component to successful schools. Unfortunately, as chair of the District Advisory Committee's (DAC) Parent Advocacy Task Force (PATF), I cannot confirm this commitment.

During his tenure as superintendent of the Kansas City Public Schools (KCPS), Dr Covington fostered a contentious and often times adversarial relationship with parent advocates. This is evident in Dr Covington's handling of the Delano school closing, and Carver contract proposal. I am using these examples because I helped to organize parents around these issues and have maintained audio recordings of meetings with Dr. Covington, and written documentation concerning the events that occurred including: letters from parents to Dr Covington, signed petitions, email communications with Dr Covington and his staff, and presentations and statements made by parents during the public comments portion of the KCPS Board of Directors open meetings. I am happy to provide you with this documentation upon request.

Concerning the closing of Delano school, a school for special needs students, Dr Covington hosted 2 open forums in accordance with board policy where he informed parents of the schools closing and invited them to ask questions concerning the transfer of students. Initially parents with disabled children were outraged because the staff at the Delano school was considered to be a safe haven for students with moderate to severe physical and mental disabilities. As such the parents demanded that the school remain open indefinitely, a request that was unreasonable considering state law that required students to be placed in the least restrictive environment.

As a parent advocate, I provided parents with information concerning the state requirements and worked to clearly define the parent's concern. Ultimately the parents, though uncomfortable with inclusive classrooms, determined that they were most concerned about the quality of care and instruction their children would receive when the Delano school closed. As such the parents requested information concerning trainings offered to teachers instructing in inclusive classrooms and facility accessibility. Dr Covington and his senior staff repeatedly refused to provide the information requested, so the parents began submitting Sunshine requests for the public records that senior administrators refused to provide. After receiving and reviewing the information, parents became more concerned with the quality of instruction that would be provided and requested that the Board of directors audit the Special Education Department. The request was granted. The audit showed that with the exception of facilities the department was not prepared to provide quality care and instruction for special needs students.

Additionally parents requested that Dr Covington postpone the closing of Delano for one year and use that time to prepare and train teachers to use the co-teaching model in inclusive classrooms. The request was made based on the recommendation of MPACT, a statewide training and information center that serves parents of disabled children, and the University of Missouri-Kansas City's Resource for Professional Development Centers, both of which stated that to be effective teachers needed a minimum of six months training to be effective in using the model. Initially, Dr Covington and his staff intended to provide just 2 hours of disability sensitivity training to teachers in co-teaching classrooms as a result of parent advocacy and a mandate from the Board of Directors to provide more training. Teacher's received 8 hours of training that covered disability sensitivity and individualized education plans.

Throughout this process Dr Covington refused to work with parent leaders unless instructed to do so by the Board of Directors, he refused to provide parents with requested public records unless

District Advisory Committee 2011-2012

Fred Hudgins, Sr. - Chairperson

Elisha Verge - Vice-Chair • Christine White - Corresponding Secretary

Donna Hoffman - Recording Secretary • Jamekia Kendrix - Member at Large

Parent Resource Center @ Manual Technical Career Center

1215 E. Truman Road, KCMO 64106 - (816) 418-8617 - kcmsddac@gmail.com or Facebook KCMSD DAC

Sunshine requests were submitted to the legal department, and refused to consider reasonable requests made concerning instruction. Ultimately, because of his disregard for parent input and concerns, the number of days spent in out of school suspension increased dramatically for exceptional education students during the 2011-12 school year and more than 30% of KCPS exceptional education students transferred out of the district during that same year.

Concerning the proposal to make George Washington Carver Dual Language, a Spanish-English full immersion/dual language signature school, a contract school, Dr Covington refused to provide assurances that he and his staff would support the dual language programming at Carver by informing parents of proposed changes to the programming and impact that proposed changes would have and seeking parent input concerning the proposed changes before changes are made. This request was made because as the chair of the School Advisory Committee for Carver, I had to speak with Dr Covington concerning program changes mandated by senior level leadership that conflicted with the research upon which the model was based. On three separate occasions, senior level administrators came to the school and demanded that English instruction time be increased and Spanish decreased while refusing to look at the research and evidence that supported the existing levels of Spanish-English instruction. Throughout the process I met with Dr Covington on a weekly basis. Each time asking Dr Covington how we could work together to support the dual language programming and eliminate the need for parents to submit a request to become a contract school to the Board of Directors. At the beginning of the process Dr Covington and his Chief of Staff would meet with me. Toward the end of the process Dr Covington his chief of staff and at least 5 of his senior administrators, none of whom spoke during the meeting, would meet with me. I believed this to be a failed attempt at intimidation. He finally refused to continue meeting with me and said: "do what you need to do because I and I will not be forced to answer to parents." He also described the interactions as "going to war." Because of this parents and teachers had no choice, but to move forward with submitting a contract school proposal to Dr Covington and the Board of Directors.

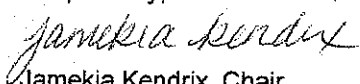
According to Board policy, the Carver contract proposal could not be considered by the board without Dr Covington's recommendation. Dr Covington refused to consider the proposal and fired the principal had acted as an advocate for the program since its inception. He issued a rejection letter before the proposal was submitted and refused to reconsider it despite more than 250 letters submitted by parents in support of the proposal and more than 500 petition signatures representing more than 80% of the families at Carver Dual language. Today, more than 50 of the families and staff that had supported the dual language programming at Carver, moving with the program on three separate occasions, have transferred and a number of students are receiving supplemental education services and tutoring to recover the year of instruction lost during the 2011-12 school year when the program came under new leadership.

Two examples of the contentious and adversarial relationship Dr Covington fostered with parents are described above, but there are several others. These examples explain why I do not believe that Dr Covington values parents and parent input as a part of successful schools, except when parents are uninformed and willing to ignore problems with reform implementation at the school level.

This disregard for parents benefited KCPS during the right-sizing process because it enabled Dr Covington to close more than 30 schools causing the district to become fiscally solvent. However, this approach also allowed many of the reforms that looked great on paper to be implemented poorly thereby having a very negative impact on student achievement and causing the district to lose accreditation in January 2012.

If you have any questions or need more information, feel free to contact me at Jamekia.Kendrix@gmail.com or 816-509-9240.

Respectfully,



Jamekia Kendrix, Chair
DAC Parent Advocacy Task Force